DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 296 RC 014 474

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TITLE A Research Report of Small/Rural School Districts in New Mexico Compared to School Districts of Similiar Size Nationwide.
PUB DATE 17 Nov 83
NOTE 9p.; For related documents, see ED 228 013, ED 231 573, ED 231 583, and RC 014 470-479.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Administrators; Comparative Analysis; Courses; *Curriculum; Declining Enrollment; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Extracurricular Activities; Profiles; Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; *School Districts; School Size; School Statistics; *Small Schools; State Surveys; Student Teacher Ratio; *Superintendents; *Teachers; Teacher Salaries
IDENTIFIERS *New Mexico

ABSTRACT

A 1982-83 survey produced data used to compare 17 small/rural K-12 New Mexico school districts (900 students or fewer) with 642 similar districts nationwide. Of New Mexico's 88 school districts, 43 were identified as qualifying (48.9%, enrolling 16,648 students), for comparison to 4,125 similar districts nationwide. A questionnaire mailed to superintendents of 23 randomly-selected New Mexico districts and 816 randomly-selected districts nationwide yielded respective response rates of 73.9% and 78.7%. A 3-page table compares New Mexico and national data in sections on the district, superintendent, student performance, and school programs. For example, school programs are compared on percent of districts employing certain resource personnel full or part-time--special education (New Mexico: 94.1%, national: 86.6%), school counselor (94.1%, 79.4%), school psychologist (0%, 33.8%), school nurse (52.9%, 45.1%), librarian/media specialist (82.3%, 80.9%), adult education director (0%, 22%), community education director (0%, 7.8%), and vocational education director (0%, 22%). Districts are also compared as to sports programs and percent of districts offering courses in Spanish (New Mexico: 11.8%, national: 41.8%), German (11.8%, 9.7%), French (11.8%, 18.9%), calculus (11.8%, 35.9%), chemistry (11.8%, 79.4%), computer science (47.1%, 60.3%), electronics (0%, 13%), vocational agriculture (70.6%, 63.1%), and physics (41.2%, 67.7%). (MH)

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ED237296

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW MEXICO COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
New Mexico State Department of Education
November 17, 1983

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RC014474

NEW MEXICO

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in New Mexico enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Seventeen districts were surveyed in New Mexico; 642 distircts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW MEXICO COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in New Mexico with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In New Mexico, 43 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 48.9 percent of the state's 88

operating public school districts and enrolled 16,648 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 23 districts in New Mexico, of which 17 responded (73.9 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in New Mexico with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

New Mexico is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist New Mexico educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW MEXICO AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	New Mexico	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	386	436
2. Average number of schools per district	2.4	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	158.6	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	1142	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	61.6	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	37.5	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	41.2	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$318,705	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	88.2	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	29.4	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	46.9	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	76.5	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	17.6	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	5.9	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	5.8	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	41.2	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	70.5	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	17.6	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	29.4	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	12.1	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	14.5	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:14.5	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83)	10.5	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$15,478	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$24,327	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83)	$20,429	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	New Mexico	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	17.0	14.5
9. Average number of <u>different</u> subject preparations for secondary teachers	5.3	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	26.0	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	0	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	4.5	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	2.5	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	36.7	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	13.0	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	94.1	86.6
School Counselor	94.1	79.4
School Psychologist	0	33.8
School Nurse	52.9	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	82.3	80.9
Adult Education Director	0	22.0
Community Education Director	0	7.8
Vocational Education Director	0	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	76.5	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	17.6	55.4
Softball	5.9	37.1
Volleyball	82.4	65.7
Cross Country Track	5.8	23.3
Soccer	0	7.0
Wrestling	0	25.2
Track and Field	94.1	78.7
Golf	5.9	22.4
Tennis	5.9	16.3
Swimming	5.9	3.2
Gymnastics	5.9	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	New Mexico	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	11.8	41.8
German	11.8	9.7
French	11.8	18.9
Calculus	11.8	35.9
Chemistry	11.8	79.4
Computer Science	47.1	60.3
Electronics	0	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	70.6	63.1
Physics	41.2	67.7

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